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Book Review - Between the Wedding & the War: The Bulloch/Roosevelt Letters 1854-1860

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Off the SHELF

Between the Wedding & the War: The Bulloch/Roosevelt Letters 1854–1860 by Gwendolyn I. Koehler and Connie M. Huddleston (Friends of Bulloch, Inc., 2016: ISBN 978-0-6927-5963-9, \$16.99)

Between the Wedding and the War is the second in a three-volume series of compilations of Bulloch and Roosevelt family letters. The first volume, *Mittie & Thee: An 1853 Roosevelt Romance*, chronicles the courtship and marriage of Theodore Roosevelt Sr. and Martha “Mittie” Bulloch, parents of President Theodore Roosevelt. A third volume of letters currently in production spans the experiences of the entwined Bulloch and Roosevelt families during the Civil War years. Bulloch Hall is an 1839 Greek Revival house in Roswell, Georgia, that now operates as an historic house museum and was Mittie’s childhood home.

Mittie Roosevelt moved to New York after her marriage, and her half-sister, Susan West, lived in Philadelphia after her own marriage. Their mother, the elder Martha and family matriarch, followed her daughters north from Georgia with her remaining unwed children. The letters of this period, many of which are extraordinarily detailed and intimate, shed new light on the early history of an American political dynasty with Northern and Southern roots in the tumultuous years leading up to war.

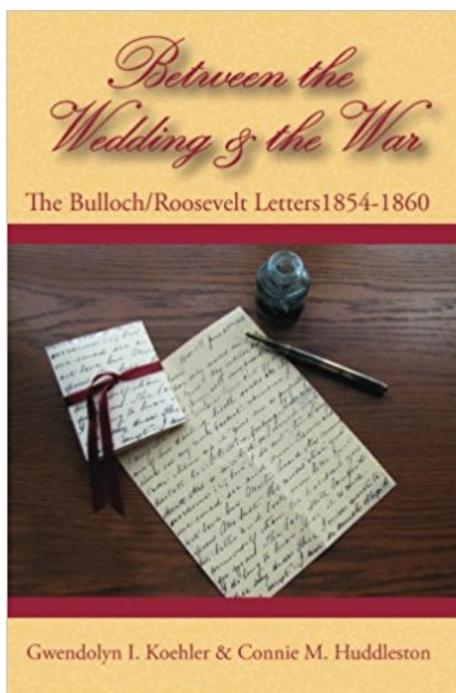
The book contains meticulous transcriptions of nearly one hundred family letters that recount

myriad aspects of daily life, business, economics, and politics. The majority of the original letters are in the Theodore Roosevelt Collection at Harvard University’s Houghton Library. Bulloch Hall staff, volunteers, and university interns transcribed, researched, and checked each letter for accuracy. The letters are presented chronologically across nine chapters punctuated by photographs, black and white illustrations, and family trees. The volume is

indexed, and a list of persons references the many individuals mentioned throughout the letters.

One of the book’s greatest strengths is the authors’ attentiveness to grounding the reader in the personal and historical contexts of the letters. The preface provides a succinct overview of the history of Bulloch Hall and the transcription process. Each chapter begins with a short essay covering national and world events during the year in which the subsequent letters were written.

Throughout the book, the letters are interspersed with prose that further illuminates the individuals, relationships, and events mentioned. For example, when Theodore Roosevelt Sr. (Thee) wrote of being stranded in New Orleans in January of 1856 with “rivers blocked up with ice,” Koehler and Huddleston reference the winter of 1856–1857 as one of the coldest in recorded US history to date. On October 28, 1858, Martha Bulloch wrote that her daughter, Mittie, “has a fine little son” after a “great trial”. The authors



underscore that the new baby was the future President Roosevelt.

The preface to this second volume of Bulloch-Roosevelt correspondence asserts that the letters open a singular window into the personal lives of leading Northern and Southern families at a “pivotal” moment in history. When reading the letters in their entirety, one discovers that they are often richly detailed, humorous, wrenching, and poignant. The

authors deftly place the intimate family portraits against the backdrop of pre-Civil War social history. The three volumes of the Bulloch Letters (one forthcoming) are highly recommended for libraries, museums, historic houses, and other collections with a focus on presidential, Southern, and pre-Civil War histories.

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University of North Georgia*